



Island County Roadside Maintenance and Weed Control

The Washington State Department of Transportation maintains 50 miles of highway (Highway 20 and Highway 525) on Whidbey Island and 3 miles of highway (Highway 532) on Camano Island. We recently proposed changes to the way we maintain roadside plants and weeds on these highways. We provided a draft plan to the public and, after listening to suggestions and questions, revised it. The revised plan will be published on WSDOT's Web site on Friday, May 7, 2004. The following information summarizes the revised plan and WSDOT's latest approach to roadside maintenance on Whidbey and Camano Islands.

WSDOT will:

- reduce herbicide use by approximately 60 percent on Whidbey and Camano Islands in 2004 compared to the average annual use for the past three years
- quit using the herbicide diuron on Whidbey and Camano Islands
- very strictly limit herbicide use on over 23 miles of highway, including an 18 mile stretch of highway on south Whidbey Island and all of Highway 532 on Camano Island. In these areas we'll eliminate the annual spring herbicide application on the three-foot section of shoulder nearest the highway and allow grass to grow up to the edge of the road surface
- continue to expand use of techniques including mowing, hand pulling and planting native plants
- work with independent experts from the University of Washington to evaluate alternative maintenance practices

How will WSDOT maintain highway roadsides on Whidbey and Camano Islands?

WSDOT will minimize herbicide use and reduce maintenance costs by using integrated vegetation management, which simply means using the right tool (or right combinations of tools) for the right plant at the right time. We will use a variety of techniques including mowing, hand pulling, planting native plants and selectively using herbicides.

Where will we most strictly limit herbicide use?

We will not use herbicides at:

- Highway 525 near the drinking water collection area, milepost 11.7 to milepost 11.9. We will maintain this area by mowing and hand pulling weeds
- any location where an adjacent property owner maintains the roadside as outlined in a contract with WSDOT (owner maintain agreement)

WSDOT will allow grasses to grow up to the edge of the pavement and very strictly restrict herbicide use at:

- Highway 525, Clinton ferry dock to north of the Greenbank Farm, milepost 8.5 to milepost 26.45
- Highway 20 near Keystone Spit, milepost 8.5 to milepost 26.45
- Highway 20 near Penn Cove, milepost 25.47 to milepost 26.14
- Highway 532 on Camano Island, milepost 0 to milepost 2.91 (the entire stretch of highway on the island)

In these locations, herbicides will only be used when absolutely necessary for noxious weed control, Horsetail near the edge of the highway and weeds near guardrail.

Where will we apply herbicides?

WSDOT will continue to work during the coming years to minimize herbicide use on all Island County state highways. Volunteers are allowed to hand pull and cut nuisance species such as Scotch Broom and Himalayan Blackberry by signing an agreement with WSDOT. However, we find it necessary to judiciously use herbicides in the following locations:

Adjacent shoulder

WSDOT typically applies herbicides to an approximately three-foot wide strip of shoulder immediately adjacent to the road surface annually to keep it free of vegetation, enhance driver and worker safety and protect the road surface from damage. WSDOT will apply herbicides to this area on about 30 miles of highway in Island County.

Guardrails

Vegetation contributes to decay of guardrail supports and threaten driver safety. Mowing around guardrail must be done by hand and is time consuming and costly. We will maintain the shoulder adjacent to the highway under guardrails in all locations.

Noxious weeds

Noxious weeds threaten native plants and agriculture. As a result, state law and the Island County Noxious Weed Control Board require all landowners to control a variety of plant species in Island County. We will work with the county weed board to document, coordinate and prioritize the most effective control measures for each individual species and location. We will use the right tool for the right plant at the right time to control noxious weeds. All treatments for noxious weeds will be carefully planned, evaluated and recorded in a database.

Our goal is to eradicate noxious weeds from the roadside while minimizing herbicide use. Weeds will be controlled by hand pulling, with mowing, and with spot herbicide treatments when necessary. Herbicides will not be used in standing water or wet soils unless absolutely necessary. If it is necessary to apply herbicides in standing water or wet soils we will comply with our Federal permit administered by the Department of Ecology.

Horsetail

WSDOT will selectively apply herbicides to any location on Whidbey Island where Horsetail is present within three feet of highway pavement. If not controlled, this plant will grow up through the pavement edge and damage the highway. Herbicides provide the only means of control.

Alder

Alders that are less than six feet tall will be hand cut or controlled with a hand application of herbicide.

What herbicides will we use?

For 2004, we will use the following herbicides to treat weeds:

- Roundup Pro at 32 ounces per acre in combination with Oust at 6 ounces an acre for shoulder applications
- Roundup Pro at 32 ounces an acre will be used to control vegetation under guardrails in areas where we strictly limit herbicide use
- Telar at 2 ounces an acre where the weed horsetail is present within three feet of a highway
- Krenite may be used at a rate of 1.5 gal. per acre in the fall for control of alder under 6 ft. in height where it is growing too close to the highway

- Other herbicides for selective noxious weed control may include Telar, Garlon 3A, and Escort
- Garlon 4 may be used to treat cut tree stumps to prevent regrowth

How will we control other vegetation near the roadway?

All nuisance weeds, trees and brush that affect highway safety will be mowed or trimmed back.

Conifers will be mowed or pulled by hand. In many areas we will mow a six- to eight-foot wide area next to the shoulder in July. These areas will be mowed again if needed in late August or September.

In other areas small trees and brush within 15 feet of highway pavement will be mowed or pulled and cut by hand. Overhanging limbs or branches from trees such as Alder or Cottonwood will be removed by hand cutting. Alders that are less than six feet tall will be hand cut or controlled with a hand application of herbicide.

How will WSDOT protect wetlands and streams?

WSDOT will not apply herbicides within areas designated as critical except when absolutely necessary for control of noxious weeds as required by law. When herbicides are required for noxious weed control in critical habitat areas WSDOT will follow all state and federal regulations and permit requirements.

How will WSDOT work with people who own wells near the highway?

WSDOT will obtain a list of all individual well owners adjacent to the highways from Island County and provide information about our new roadside vegetation management plan. We will then work with individual neighbors to address their questions and concerns.

In 1996 WSDOT wrote to all Class A and B water purveyors in the state with wellhead recharge zones extending under the highway right of way. We provided information about highway maintenance and operations activities and invited them to include us in development and implementation of wellhead protection plans.

Where can I get information about WSDOT's upcoming herbicide applications in Island County?

Contact WSDOT's local herbicide application hotline at 360-848-7238 for up to date information about WSDOT herbicide application in Island County.

What are the differences between WSDOT's winter 2004 highway roadside maintenance proposal and the final plan?

WSDOT provided a draft Whidbey Island Integrated Vegetation Management Plan to the public. This draft plan outlined significant changes to the way we maintain highway roadsides, including:

- reduce herbicide use by 50 percent compared to the average annual use for the past three years
- quit using the herbicide diuron entirely
- very strictly limit herbicide use on 3 miles of highway. In these areas, we'll eliminate the annual spring herbicide application on the three feet of shoulder nearest the highway and allow grass to grow adjacent to the road surface
- work with independent experts from the University of Washington to evaluate these new maintenance practices

After listening to public suggestions and questions, WSDOT modified the plan to include Camano Island and further reduce herbicide use by:

- reducing herbicide use by approximately 60 percent on Whidbey and Camano Islands in 2004 compared to the average annual use for the past three years
- very strictly limiting herbicide use on over 23 miles of highway, including an 18 mile stretch of highway on south Whidbey Island and all of Highway 532 on Camano Island.

The revised plan will be published on WSDOT's Web site at <http://www.wsdot.wa.gov/maintenance/ivm.htm> on Friday, May 7, 2004.

Why do we maintain roadsides?

We must:

- Provide a safe shoulder for vehicles that veer off the road
- Keep signs and corners visible
- Screen oncoming traffic and reduce headlight glare on divided highways
- Maintain stable slopes and prevent mudslides
- Protect water quality
- Protect wildlife habitat

- Preserve or restore native plants
- Keep vegetation back from the edge of the road to help drivers spot and avoid deer and other animals
- Prevent weeds from growing into and damaging pavement
- Drain water off of the roadway to prevent puddles and standing water
- Prevent noxious weeds from spreading